

Sūrah Qamar

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrahs

This *sūrah* begins with the topic the previous *sūrah* ended on. The previous *sūrah* ends on the words: أَزِفَتْ الْأَرْفَةُ (٥٧:٥٣) (what is near has drawn near, (53:57)) and this *sūrah* begins with the words: أَفْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ (the hour of punishment is near and the moon is split asunder). In other words, the conciseness found in أَزِفَتْ الْأَرْفَةُ is elaborated by it. Besides this similarity, there is another very clear apparent similarity between the two *sūrahs*. In the previous *sūrah*, the rising and setting of stars is presented as evidence over a claim and in this *sūrah* this evidence is presented with the moon splitting asunder.

In this *sūrah*, the verse وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ is repeated many times. Such repetitive verses in a *sūrah* occupy a special significance. It is as if the speaker every now and then, while presenting arguments, wants to remind his obdurate addressees and ask them the reason for being so stubborn and the reason why they do not reflect on the reality which is being put forth before them in the light of sound arguments.

The addressees of this *sūrah* are people who, in order to find a proof of the veracity of Qur'ānic warnings, were demanding a sign of this punishment that could convince them of these warnings. The history of denial by previous nations – which is alluded to in the previous *sūrah* as well – is recounted before them in relatively more detail and they are asked to learn a lesson from their fate. Why are they insisting that they will believe only when they see the punishment hovering over their heads? They must realize that it is God's great favour on them that instead of showing a sign of the punishment, He revealed such a Book to them that had all the necessary features to comprehensively teach and remind them and remove their doubts. Alas! Instead of asking for God's mercy, they were asking for His punishment.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-8): The Prophet (sws) has been assured that he should not pay any heed to the stubborn and obstinate people who were demanding to see the doom they had been promised. The greatest of signs shall not

induce them to accept faith because they do not follow sense and reason; instead they are the followers of their whims and desires. The anecdotes about the fate of various earlier nations should be a big lesson for them, but unfortunately they do not have the ability to learn from history. The Prophet (sws) is further consoled that they will not pay heed to his Message; he should leave their matter to the summoner who, on the Day of Judgement shall be summoning them not to the Qur'ān but to Hell. They shall respond to his call, emerging from their graves like locusts scattered about.

Verses (9-42): The Quraysh have been directed to learn a lesson from the fate of the people of Noah, (sws) the 'Aḥl Thamūd, Lot (sws) and Pharaoh. These people, like the Quraysh, also rejected their respective prophets, and the Quraysh very well know what happened to them. If the Quraysh also follow in their footsteps, they will meet a similar fate. They must bear in mind that it is a great blessing of the Almighty that He has revealed the Quran to warn them of this danger beforehand. He has made it easy for them so they can seek a lesson from it and be reminded. Instead of acknowledging this favour of the Almighty and benefiting from it, it is their extreme misfortune that they are asking for punishment.

Verses (43-55): The Quraysh have been cautioned that when in the past the Almighty has never spared the disbelievers, they should not consider themselves an exception to this rule. Are they of some special and exalted breed that they shall be spared? Do they reckon that the Almighty has written a directive of acquittal for them in the Hereafter in the heavenly scriptures, and do they think that they shall be able to defend themselves against Allah in the Hereafter? If they have such foolish ideas, they must remember that the Almighty shall never treat the disbelievers and the righteous equally. He shall punish the disbelievers by throwing them into Hell and reward the righteous with Paradise.

Section I: Verses (1-8)

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اَفْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ (۱) وَاِنْ يَرَوْا آيَةً يُعْرِضُوا وَيَقُولُوا سِحْرٌ مُّسْتَقَرٌّ (۲)
وَكَذَّبُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ مُّسْتَقَرٌّ (۳) وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْبَاءِ مَا فِيهِ مُزْدَجَرٌ
(۴) حِكْمَةٌ بَالِغَةٌ فَمَا تُغْنِ التُّذُرُ (۵) فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ يَدْعُ الدَّاعِ إِلَى شَيْءٍ نُكْرٍ (۶)

خُشْعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ (٧) مُهْطِعِينَ إِلَى الدَّاعِ
يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ (٨)

In the name of God, the Most-Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

The hour of punishment has arrived and the moon is cleft asunder. And whatever sign they see, they will only evade it and remark: "This is a magic not new." And they denied and followed their fancies and every matter has an appointed time. And the anecdotes of the past have reached them which have a lot of lessons and profound wisdom. But of what use are these warnings? So ignore them and wait for the day in which a summoner will summon them to a very undesirable thing. Their eyes shall be downcast and they shall come out of their graves like locusts scattered about, hastening towards the summoner. At that time, the disbelievers will cry: "This is, indeed, a ruthless day!" (1-8)

Explanation

اقْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ^١

The word السَّاعَةُ refers to the time of judgement and the punishment of which the Quraysh have been warned in all the *sūrahs* of this group and specially jolted and shaken to pay heed to it in the previous *sūrah* by the words: أَزِفَتْ الْأَرْفَةُ (53:57) (what is near has drawn near, (53:57)). They must not regard this hour to be distant; they must wake up from their slumber and try to save themselves from its horrors by following only the plan they are being given.

I have been explaining at various places of this *tafsīr* that the messengers of God warned their people of two punishments: the punishment which a nation necessarily faces in this world if it does not pay heed to the warnings of its messenger and becomes adamant in denying him and the punishment which it will face in the Hereafter. The only difference between the two punishments is that of the beginning and the end or the prelude and the culmination. The nation which is seized by the punishment of denying its messenger is in fact seized for the punishment of the Hereafter. For this reason, at times, the word السَّاعَةُ consists of both these punishments. Viewed thus, the time of judgement has drawn near for every nation to whom a messenger is sent. In other words, the statement اقْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ is not an exaggeration; it portrays a fact.

The words وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ state a sign of the hour of punishment drawing near. I have been referring to an established practice of God at many places of this *tafsīr*: in every nook and corner of this universe exist the

1. The hour of punishment has arrived and the moon is cleft asunder.

signs of God's power and wisdom and every now and then, new signs appear. However, in the times of the messengers, the Almighty specially reveals certain signs which substantiate the warnings of the respective messenger as well as his claim to messengerhood. The Qur'ān mentions this established practice at various places. As an example, consider the verse: *سَرِّبُهُمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَقَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ (٥٣:٤١)* (We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, (41:53)). The purpose of these signs, as I have indicated, is to strengthen the warnings delivered by the messenger. The facts which are openly proclaimed by him are substantiated by various signs which manifest themselves in various forms so that people are left with no excuse to deny the truth. One of these signs, in order to substantiate the warnings of the Prophet (sws), manifested itself in the form of cleaving asunder of the moon. The purpose was to make it clear upon the addressees that the scenario which the Qur'ān mentions viz. the shaking of the earth, the gliding in the air of crushed mountains, the crossing of boundaries by the oceans and the darkening of the sun are not meant merely to strike awe; these are definite occurrences which will happen one day. They are not improbable: their proofs keep appearing in some form in this world.

It is not necessary that a messenger present such signs as miracles; they can appear without any proclamation and without throwing any challenge. It is not even necessary that the disbelievers demand the specific sign they are shown; it could be shown to them without their demand merely to dispel the doubts created by them. The reason that the disbelievers regarded the Hereafter to be far-fetched was that they reckoned it impossible that one day the whole universe would be wrecked and destroyed. Their question cited by the Qur'ān regarding the mountains shows that they regarded them to be eternal and everlasting. By showing the sign of the moon cleaving asunder, the Almighty has informed them that none of the objects of this universe, however huge it may be, is independent or immortal; everything is subservient to His directive; He can destroy it whenever He wants to.

As far as the question of such an incident taking place at the time of the Prophet (sws) is concerned, it is evident from the Qur'ān and corroborated by Ḥadīth in my view that such an incident did take place. The Aḥādīth do vary as to the nature of the incident but there is no difference of opinion in that the event took place. Some people are of the opinion that this is merely the information of an incident that will take place on the Day of Judgement; it is mentioned in the past tense to express its certainty. They translate the verse as: "The Day of Judgement has drawn near and the moon will cleave asunder." Though this opinion is also ascribed to some

earlier authorities and is held by some people of these times as well, yet the context hinders this interpretation. There is no doubt that the events which will happen on the Day of Judgement are mentioned in the Qur'ān in the past tense; however, if the verse is translated thus, it will bear no relationship with the next verse. The next verse says that whatever sign they will see will have no effect on them and they will show indifference to it; they will say that there is nothing unique in it and is in fact magic which is not new. A little deliberation shows that if this cleaving asunder of the moon was related to the Hereafter, there was no purpose or occasion for stating what has just been cited. On the Day of Judgement the staunchest of disbelievers will not be able to regard this as magic; everyone will acknowledge that each and every fact given by the messengers has come true word for word. Thus the words of a subsequent verse are: *يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ* (٨ : ٥٤) (At that time, the disbelievers will cry: "This is, indeed, a ruthless day!" (53:8)).

There is no room to express the doubt that had such an incident taken place, it should have been mentioned in the history of other nations. There are so many incidents related to our own earth and to other planets in which pieces are destroyed or they break away or are pulled in but in earlier times their observation was limited to a certain sphere. In current times, international observatories and research institutes have been established to investigate such phenomena. Hence as soon as an incident takes place, these institutes immediately take notice of it and in no time inform people round the world of what has happened. In earlier times, such means of research and informing others were non-existent and for this reason the news of such events was confined to a certain sphere. However, this sphere in itself belongs to reliable people; hence, there is no reason to deny the happening of such an event. It is very probable that in coming times, scientists are able to investigate the moon in a more elaborate manner and it becomes evident through scientific research that a certain portion of the moon was part of a certain other portion and at a certain time it detached itself from it and became part of a certain other portion. These days many similar disclosures are being made every now and then about our earth and people believe them. So why should one express wonder at this news given by the Qur'ān about the moon? If science has yet to corroborate it, it only shows its limitation. One should wait and be patient; it is very possible that in future it is forced to acknowledge such a happening.

وَإِنْ يَرَوْا آيَةً يُعَرِّضُوا وَيَقُولُوا سِحْرٌ مُسْتَمِرٌّ²(٢)

This verse sounds an assurance to the Prophet (sws) and rebukes the disbelievers: the real reason for their denial is not that they are not being shown a sign for numerous signs exist around them and every now and then new ones appear; however, these stubborn people do not want to believe in reward and punishment and for this reason do not learn a lesson from the greatest of signs. Even if the Prophet (sws) shows them a bigger sign than the cleaving asunder of the moon, they will disregard it by calling it to be a product of magic.

The word سِحْرٌ (magic) qualified by مُسْتَمِرٌّ in this verse is meant to express the fact that not only will they call this sign a product of magic, but in order to fool people, they will also tell them that even this is nothing new and unique as to be given importance; such magic has been shown and taught by magicians of the past which they have continuously transmitted to later generations of magicians. In other words, what they meant was that on the basis of this sign, there is no reason to regard him as some extraordinary magician much less regard him a warner sent by God. Some people have interpreted the word مُسْتَمِرٌّ to mean “mortal”; however, I am unable to find this meaning in the corpus of Arabic literature known to me.

وَكَذَّبُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ مُسْتَقَرٌّ³(٣)

Mentioned in this verse is their denial, the reason for their denial and its consequences: the Quraysh have denied the warner sent by God and the warnings delivered by him and instead followed their own whims which made them worthy of punishment as per the established practice of God. However, to God each matter has an appointed time and a set plan. So when their period of respite ends, they shall be seized by Him. In other words, if they are being let off for the time being, it does not mean that the warnings of the Prophet (sws) are baseless; the fact of the matter is that the time is yet to come on which the Almighty has ordained destruction for them. Indeed, this time is drawing near.

The words وَكَذَّبُوا and وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ after وَكَذَّبُوا point to the reason for their denial: if they denied the warnings of the Prophet (sws), it does not mean that they had some reason for this denial or have certain doubts about it which need to be clarified or they have not been shown a sign that can convince them; the only reason for this is that they are slaves to their

2. And whatever sign they see, they will only evade it and remark: “This is a magic not new.”

3. And they denied and followed their fancies and every matter has an appointed time.

desires. If they accept reward and punishment, they will have to abandon their desires, which they do not have the courage to do. For this reason, they are presenting various lame excuses. This subject has already been explained in detail in verse twenty nine of Sūrah Najm.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْبَاءِ مَا فِيهِ مُزْدَجَرٌ⁴

This verse further explains the previous one: if they have not yet faced God's punishment, it does not mean that there has been a change in the practice of God. Anecdotes about previous nations have been recounted to them; if they reflect on them, there are enough lessons to be learnt. They will come to know from these anecdotes that whichever nation denied the warnings of its messenger, was ultimately punished by God. Because of a delay in the coming of this punishment, these earlier nations too wrongly concluded that the warnings of their messengers were baseless; yet they finally came true. In other words, it is in their own interest to learn a lesson from history and not wait to believe at the time when it will be too late. Such a belated acknowledgement was neither of any benefit to the earlier nations nor will be of any benefit to them.

The anecdotes of previous nations have been mentioned both briefly and in detail in the previous *sūrahs*, and are coming up in this *sūrah* too from verse nine onwards. Readers will see that at the end of every anecdote the words فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرٌ (how [dreadful] was My punishment, how [stern] was My warning?) are repeated to make it clear on the addressees that in this manner the warnings of a messenger come true and in this manner his deniers are punished.

حِكْمَةٌ بَالِغَةٌ فَمَا تُغْنِ التُّذُرُ⁵

These anecdotes contain absorbing wisdom; Alas! Of what benefit are these warnings to such people? The particle مَا can connote negation as well as interrogation; however, the latter usage has more emphasis in it and is also more in harmony with the context and occasion,

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ يَدْعُ الدَّاعِ إِلَى شَيْءٍ تُكْرِ⁶

This is a reassuring directive given to the Prophet (sws) that it is

4. And the anecdotes of the past have reached them which have a lot of lessons and profound wisdom.

5. But of what use are these warnings?

6. So ignore them and wait for the day in which a summoner will summon them to a very undesirable thing.

beyond him to guide such blind people. He should ignore them, and patiently wait for the day when Raphael will blow the trumpet and summon them to the punishment of the Hereafter.

The verb *تَوَلَّى* encompasses the meaning of *إِنْتَظَرَ* (wait). At a similar place, the words are: *وَاسْتَمِعْ يَوْمَ يُنَادِ الْمُنَادِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ (٥٠: ٤١)* (and listen for the day when the crier will call from a place, (50:41)). The word *نُكْرٍ* refers to the horrors of the Day of Judgment. In order to express the intensity of these horrors, a vague style is adopted. The implication is that today they are disregarding the calls given to them to prepare for that day, but soon the time will come when a caller will call them to its horrors and everyone will run towards it in compliance and in fear.

خُشَّعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنتَشِرٌ (٧) مُهْطِعِينَ إِلَى الدَّاعِ
يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ (٨)⁷

Today the messenger of God is inviting them to prepare to save themselves from the horrors of that day; however, when the caller of the Day of Judgement will call them, they will emerge from their graves the way locusts do and their situation will be such that because of humiliation downcast will be their eyes and they will be swiftly running towards the caller.

The words *خُشَّعًا* and *مُهْطِعِينَ* are accusatives of state (*hāl*). The expression *كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنتَشِرٌ* portrays the emerging of people from the grave after the trumpet is blown. One may have seen moths emerging in the rainy season at the onset of the evening. It is as if a storm of moths has appeared. The situation of locusts is no different and the same will be the case of people coming out of their graves. The Almighty has shown these signs to remind man of the Hereafter in every part of the heavens and the earth.

The meaning of the words *يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ* is that when the messenger of God warns them of the horrors of that Day, they regard it to be far-fetched and improbable, and they stubbornly make fun of it, yet when that Day will appear before them they will regretfully cry out that the severe day which the prophets and messengers of God had informed them of has arrived.

7. Their eyes shall be downcast and they shall come out of their graves like locusts scattered about, hastening towards the summoner. At that time, the disbelievers will cry: "This is, indeed, a ruthless day!"

Section II: Verses (9-17)

In verse four above, the Quraysh have been asked why they are insisting on seeing the punishment and why they do not seek a lesson from the history of previous nations which has been narrated to them. In the coming section of verses, in order to explain this further, the history of the messengers and their people is mentioned. Like the Quraysh, these nations also made fun of the warnings sounded to them by their respective messengers; ultimately, they were seized by the punishment they had been warned of; so it is in their own interest not to call for their doom by blindly following in the footsteps of these nations and instead be reminded by the Book of God revealed through His special grace for the purpose of their education and instruction. This Book is fully equipped with everything needed to educate and remind them.

Readers may now proceed to read the next section of verses.

Text and Translation

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ فَكَذَّبُوا عَبْدَنَا وَقَالُوا مَجْنُونٌ وَازْدُجِرَ (٩) فَدَعَا رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَغْلُوبٌ
فَانْتَصِرْ (١٠) فَفَتَحْنَا أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَاءٍ مُنْهَمِرٍ (١١) وَفَجَّرْنَا الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا فَالْتَقَى الْمَاءُ
عَلَى أَمْرٍ قَدْ قُدِرَ (١٢) وَحَمَلْنَاهُ عَلَى ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ (١٣) تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءَ لِمَن كَانَ
كُفِرَ (١٤) وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَاهَا آيَةً فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (١٥) فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذْرٍ (١٦) وَلَقَدْ
يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (١٧)

Before them, the folks of Noah also denied. They rejected Our servant and said that he was a madman, and he was badly scolded. So he implored before his Lord: "I am vanquished; so You take revenge from them." So We opened the gates of heaven with water pouring forth, and caused the earth to burst with gushing springs. The waters met at the point decreed and We carried him on that which was made of planks and nails, which sailed under Our protection: this We did as a recompense for him who had been slighted. And We made this anecdote an exemplary story [for those who may seek a lesson]. So is there anyone who would take heed! See how true was My punishment and My warning? And We have made the Qur'ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there any who shall take heed?!! (9-17)

Explanation

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ فَكَذَّبُوا عَبْدَنَا وَقَالُوا مَجْنُونٌ وَازْدُجِرَ⁸ (٩)

I have said earlier that this and the subsequent verses mention in detail the history of some prophetic nations briefly referred to before. Since the sequence adopted is chronological, the anecdote of Noah (sws) is mentioned first. It is said that before the Quraysh, the folks of Noah (sws) had also denied the warnings of God's messenger. This is in fact an assurance sounded to the Prophet Muhammad (sws) that he is not the first person to be rejected by his people. The history of these rejecters is very old. Before them, the people of Noah (sws) had also rejected their prophet, as had other nations whose details are forthcoming. In other words, this is a well-known story of history which was encountered by previous messengers. The Prophet Muhammad (sws) will also face it and the very fate met by the previous nations for their rejection will be met by his nation if they follow in their footsteps.

The letter ف in وَازْدُجِرَ is for explication. After briefly referring to the incident, with these words begin the details: the people of Noah (sws) denied God's servant; they called him a madman and a crazy person and badly snubbed him.

The affection of God for Noah (sws) reflected in the word عَبْدَنَا is self-evident. When the messengers of God warned people of the punishment both in this world and in the next and warned them very thoroughly and diligently day in and day out, it weighed heavily upon these people who had become slaves to the pleasure of this life and who were inebriated with their worldly status and achievements. They could not understand the reason and the source from which this punishment would come. If punishment was destined for them, why were they blessed with affluence and honour in this world? This affluence and honour bore evidence that God held them in high esteem, and if ever there was another world, there too they would hold this high position. By being led into this misconception, they became so annoyed with the constant and persistent warnings of the messenger of God that they started calling him a madman and a crazy person; they would say that this person had been overcome with the despair of punishment and of the Hereafter and that at every instant he saw this punishment hovering about. In this manner, they would not only release their anger, they would also try to assure the masses that they should not be influenced by the warnings of the messenger for he was not a messenger in the first place; he was a crazy

8. Before them, the folks of Noah also denied. They rejected Our servant and said that he was a madman, and he was badly scolded.

person who constantly spoke of punishment.

The word *وَازْدَجَرَ* refers to the threats the people of Noah (sws) gave him about stoning him to death. Thus, for example, the words in Sūrah Shu‘arā are: (١١٦:٢٦) *قَالُوا لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهِ يَا نُوحُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمَرْجُومِينَ* (They threatened: “Noah! If you do not desist from your ways, you shall end among those who have been stoned,” (26:116))

فَدَعَا رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَغْلُوبٌ فَانْتَصِرُ⁹(١٠)

When the animosity of his people reached the extent that they threatened to stone him to death, he cried out and implored to God that he had done whatever was in his power to convince them but was unable to do so; he no longer had the power to continue, and hence God should then deal with these arrogant people in His own way.

The word *إِنْتَصَارٌ* means “to defend” and “to take revenge”. Noah (sws) requested God to help him take revenge from them for their arrogance. The complete details of Noah’s prayer are mentioned in Sūrah Nūḥ ahead.

فَفَتَحْنَا أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَاءٍ مُنْهَمِرٍ^(١١) وَفَجَّرْنَا الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا فَالْتَقَى الْمَاءُ عَلَى أَمْرٍ قَدْ قُدِرَ^(١٢)

Mentioned in these verses are the details of the cyclonic storm that was encountered by Noah’s people after his prayer. I have already mentioned its details in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Dhāriyāt. The Almighty opened the gates of the sky with water pouring forth, and caused the earth to burst with gushing springs. Obviously, such a stormy rain in which all the gates of the heavens had been opened would turn the earth into seas, rivers and canals.

The words *فَالْتَقَى الْمَاءُ عَلَى أَمْرٍ قَدْ قُدِرَ* refer to the fact that the point up to which the Almighty had fixed for the water to rise was the very point the water from the sky and the earth touched each other and engulfed Noah’s people in a manner that no one was able to escape from its grasp.

وَحَمَلْنَاهُ عَلَى ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ^(١٣)

The words *ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ* obviously refer to the Noah’s ark which he built as per the special directive of the Almighty. Mentioning it here with its components, in my opinion, is to express God’s power, wisdom, affection, mercy and majesty. The implication is that the Almighty saved

9. So he implored before his Lord: “I am vanquished; so You take revenge from them.”

10. So We opened the gates of heaven with water pouring forth, and caused the earth to burst with gushing springs. The waters met at the point decreed

11. And We carried him on that which was made of planks and nails,

those He wanted to by logs fixed together with nails from the storm which routed the whole nation and which not a single soul survived. In other words, the real thing is God's mercy and affection. If they are with a person, then a few logs can save them from Noah's deluge, and if they desert a person, the greatest of war ships are flattened in the blink of any eye, and the strongest of dams are blown away like straws by the power of the deluge.

تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءَ لِّمَن كَانَ كُفِرَ¹²

Since this ark was under the special protection and safe-keeping of God, it kept on advancing without any fear and tidal waves could not harm it in any way. It may be kept in mind that it was not Noah (sws) alone who had a boat; others too had their boats; however, these boats could not be of any benefit to them because they did not have God's protection.

The words جَزَاءَ لِّمَن كَانَ كُفِرَ refer to the fact that the Almighty showed His majesty in order to help His servant who had been slighted and not duly honoured, so much so that he was compelled to cry out: أَنِّي مَغْلُوبٌ فَأَنْتَصِرْ (I am vanquished; help me)

وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَاهَا آيَةً فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ¹³

The antecedent of the pronoun in تَرَكْنَاهَا can be the land referred to earlier in verse twelve by the words وَفَجَّرْنَا الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا and also the anecdote of Noah's folks whose details are mentioned in the Torah and which has been widely transmitted and known in every era.

The use of pronouns in this manner is very common in Arabic. I have cited several examples of such usage in previous volumes of this exegesis, and some more will be found in the later ones. Some people regard the antecedent of this pronoun to be the remains of Noah's Ark which were sighted by some people of later generations at a certain part of Mount Jūdī. However, I do not give importance to this opinion. Details are forthcoming in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Hāqqah.

The words فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ imply that as far as signs and warning lessons are concerned, there are several on this earth and in history as well; however, if there is any dearth of anything, it is of hearts with the ability to pay heed to such signs.

12. Which sailed under Our protection: this We did as a recompense for him who had been slighted.

13. And We made this anecdote an exemplary story [for those who may seek a lesson]. So is there anyone who would take heed!

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذْرٍ¹⁴(١٦)

The word نُذْرٍ is actually نُذْرِي and the ي has been severed from it owing to the rhyme and the *kasrah* present as its remnant. The word نُذْرٍ is a noun from the verbal noun إِنْذَار and it means “warnings” and “admonition”. In other words, if a person has ears to pay heed and a heart to learn a lesson, he can see in this anecdote how profound is God’s punishment and how accurately His threats materialize.

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ¹⁵(١٧)

This verse will be repeated after the end of every Prophetic anecdote. It should be fully understood so that its explanation is not required at every instance.

People have generally interpreted this verse to mean that Almighty has made the Qur’ān a very easy book as far as memorizing it and seeking counsel from it is concerned. Though this inference in itself is correct that the Qur’ān is easy to memorize and to seek counsel from, yet this verse has a much wider connotation.

In the Arabic language, the word تَيْسِير means “to set right something through nails, to make something appropriate for a specific objective and to embellish it with all the required means and needs.” The expression يَسَّرَ الْفَرَسَ لِلرُّكُوبِ would mean that after been trained and fed, a horse was fully equipped with a saddle, a bridle and a stirrup and made ready for riding. From this usage, the word also came to be used to make a person ready for a campaign and equipped with all appropriate means and needs so that he is fully prepared for it. A poet, Muḍarris ibn Rub‘ī, belonging to the age of ignorance says:¹⁶

ونعين فاعلنا على ما نابه

حتى نيسره لفعل السيد

(And when our leader has to undertake a campaign, we help him and make it easy and suitable for him to discharge the responsibilities imposed on leaders.)

The word ذِكْرٍ is also used in a wider connotation. The meanings of

14. See how true was My punishment and My warning?

15. And We have made the Qur’ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there any who shall take heed?!!

16. Abū Tammām Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭā’i, *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 41.

educating and instructing the readers as well as reminding, informing, warning, counselling, teaching a lesson and conclusively communicating the truth to them – all are implied. It is used in all these connotations in the Qur'ān. It needs to be appreciated that the Qur'ān does not impose something external on us; on the contrary, it revives and highlights the treasures of knowledge and cognizance the Almighty has innately blessed us with and to which we do not pay heed.

After understanding the true meaning of both these words, consider now the placement and context of this verse as well as its meaning. Earlier in the *sūrah*, it was said that the punishment of which the Prophet (sws) was warning them of was inevitable. The world within man and the one surrounding him bear witness to it. Similarly, the anecdotes of the Prophetic nations also bear evidence to it; however, they are adamant that they will believe only when they see a sign of this punishment even though the Almighty has revealed to them the Qur'ān to educate and to remind them. This Qur'ān is fully equipped to fulfil this purpose. So why are they not benefiting from this great favour and are eager instead to receive the lash of this punishment?

Some Important Aspects of Qur'ānic *Taysīr*

I have already discussed in detail the various aspects of Qur'ānic *taysīr* in my book *Mabādī Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*. Here it is not possible to repeat them. However, I will allude to some of its important aspects viz a viz the verse. The purpose is to dispel the misconception of people who adduce from it that the Qur'ān is an easy and bland book which has only been revealed for memorization and reading, and that it does not require any reflection or deliberation to understand it. In their opinion, every person who even has a vague and rudimentary knowledge of Arabic can fluently understand the Qur'ān. Since this misconception can hinder a person's access to the Qur'ān, it is necessary to briefly state those aspects of Qur'ānic *taysīr* which are alluded to by God Himself.

-- The most conspicuous aspect of Qur'ānic *taysīr* to which the Qur'ān itself has alluded is that it was revealed in lucid (*mubīn*) Arabic. It was set forth in the eloquent and articulate pure language of the Quraysh which is not garbled nor muddled so that the people of Arabia could easily understand it and they were not left with an excuse to deny the truth from God.

-- The second aspect is that the Almighty revealed the Qur'ān piecemeal so that the Prophet (sws) could gradually teach it and read it out to his people who in turn were able to gradually hear and understand

it and fully digest its teachings. At one instance, the Qur'ān says: (١٠٦:١٧) وَفَرَأْنَاهُ فَتَرَفُّتَاهُ لِنُفَرِّقَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مَكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا (and We have revealed the Qur'ān in parts so that you can gradually recite it out to people and We have elaborately and painstakingly revealed it [thus] (17:106)). Had the Qur'ān been revealed in one instalment as was the demand of the disbelievers, it would have been against Qur'ānic *taysīr*.

-- The third aspect is that all the basic teachings of the Qur'ān were initially revealed in concise and succinct verses and sentences and in the form of short yet comprehensive and terse *sūrahs* so that it could be easy for people to memorize and understand them, practice what they said and convey them to others. It was only when the people were fully accustomed to the Qur'ān that the Almighty explained these concise and pithy sentences. At one place, it is said: كِتَابٌ أَحْكَمْتُ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فَصَّلْتُ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ (١:١٨) حَبِيرٍ (this is a Book, of which the verses were first concise and then they were explained from Him who is wise and all-knowing, (11:1)).

-- The fourth aspect is that every teaching and precept of the Qur'ān is mentioned in various styles and with different aspects in different contexts and in numerous backgrounds so that if at one place a reader is not fully able to understand something, he can grasp it fully at another place, and if at one place an argument is not fully appreciated, he can comprehend it in the background of a different context. The Qur'ān has called this variety and diversity in its expression as *taṣrīf*: (٥٨:٧) كَذَلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ الْآيَاتِ (thus do We diversify Our revelations, (7:58)).

-- The fifth aspect is that there exist in the Qur'ān seven groups consisting of Makkan and Madīnan *sūrahs*. Together these seven groups constitute the majestic Qur'ān. Each group has a content similar to others and also distinct. Each *sūrah* has a counterpart and both members of a pair complement one another in the discussion of a topic. While explaining verses: (٢٣:٣٩) اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِي (God has revealed the best of discourses whose verses resemble one another and whose *sūrahs* occur in pairs, (39:23)) and وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْآنَ (And [O Prophet!] We have bestowed upon you seven *mathānī*¹⁷ which is this great Qur'ān, (15:87)) I have alluded to these aspects. It is obvious that this elaborate arrangement of the Qur'ān has been done by the Almighty to facilitate Qur'ānic *taysīr*.

17. *Mathānī* () is the plural of *mathnā* () and it means something which occurs in pairs.

Section III: Verses (18-42)

For the very purpose the anecdote of Noah (sws) and his people is recounted earlier, the anecdotes of the ‘Aṯṯ Thamūd, the people of Lot (sws) and the followers of the Pharaoh are related in the forthcoming verses. Each of these anecdotes ends on the repetitive verse with which the anecdote of Noah (sws) ended.

Readers may now proceed to read the coming verses.

Text and Translation

كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَدَابِي وَنُذِرِ (١٨) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمٍ نَحْسٍ مُسْتَمِرٍّ (١٩) تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُنْقَعِرٍ (٢٠) فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَدَابِي وَنُذِرِ (٢١) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٢٢) كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِالنُّذُرِ (٢٣) فَقَالُوا أَبَشَرًا مِّنَّا وَاحِدًا نَّتَّبِعُهُ إِنَّا إِدَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ (٢٤) أَوْلَقِيَ الذِّكْرَ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا بَلْ هُوَ كَذَّابٌ أَشِرُّ (٢٥) سَيَعْلَمُونَ عَدَا مَنِ الْكَذَّابُ الْأَشِرُّ (٢٦) إِنَّا مُرْسِلُو النَّاقَةِ فِتْنَةً لَّهُمْ فَارْتَبِعْهُمْ وَاضْطَبِرْ (٢٧) وَبَنَيْنَاهُمْ أَنَّ الْمَاءَ قِسْمَةٌ بَيْنَهُمْ كُلٌّ شِرْبٍ مُخْتَصِرٌ (٢٨) فَنادَوْا صَاحِبُهُمْ فَتَعَاطَى فَعَقَرَ (٢٩) فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَدَابِي وَنُذِرِ (٣٠) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَكَانُوا كَهَشِيمِ الْمُحْتَظِرِ (٣١) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٣٢) كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ بِالنُّذُرِ (٣٣) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَاصِبًا إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ حَفَّتْهُمُ بِسَحَرٍ (٣٤) نِعْمَةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ شَكَرَ (٣٥) وَلَقَدْ أَنْذَرَهُمْ بَطْشَتَنَا فَتَمَارَوْا بِالنُّذُرِ (٣٦) وَلَقَدْ رَاودُوهُ عَنْ صَيفِهِ فَطَمَسْنَا أَعْيُنَهُمْ فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذِرِ (٣٧) وَلَقَدْ صَبَّحَهُمْ بُكْرَةً عَذَابٌ مُسْتَقِرٌّ (٣٨) فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذِرِ (٣٩) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٤٠) وَلَقَدْ جَاءَ آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ النُّذُرُ (٤١) كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كُلِّهَا فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ أَخَذَ عَزِيزٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ (٤٢)

The ‘Aṯṯ also rejected. Then observe how My punishment and My threats materialized. We let loose on them a stormy wind at a perpetual time of bad omen which plucked out people as if they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees. So see how My punishment and My threats materialized. And We have made the Qur’ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?!! (18-22)

The Thamūd also rejected the warning. They said: “Are we to follow a person who belongs to us? If we do so, we shall be clearly straying and end up in Hell. Did he alone among us receive this Reminder? In fact, he

is indeed a liar, a boaster. Tomorrow they shall know who the liar and the boaster is. We will be sending a she-camel as a test for them. So keep a watch on them and have patience, and inform them that the water is to be shared between them. Everyone shall come on his turn. Then they cried out to their leader; so he came forward and hamstrung the she-camel. Then observe how My punishment and My threats materialized. We sent upon them a single shout and they became like the trampled hedge of a sheep-fold builder. And We have made the Qur'ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?!! (23-32)

The people of Lot also rejected the warnings. So, We unleashed on them a stone-charged whirlwind; only the followers of Lot survived, whom, as a special favour, We bailed out at dawn. Thus do We reward those who are grateful. And, indeed, he informed them of Our grasp, but they only made foolish objections on the warnings. And they tempted him about his guests; so We blinded their eyes; so taste My wrath and My warning. And, indeed, at daybreak, an abiding punishment seized them. And We have made the Qur'ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?!! (33-40)

And, indeed, to the Pharaoh's people also came the warnings. But they rejected all Our signs; so We grasped them with the grasp of One Mighty, Powerful. (41-42)

Explanation

¹⁸ كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَدَايِي وَنَذِيرِ (١٨)

The word نَذِيرِ is suppressed after كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ because of clear contextual indication later. Thus it is said: كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِالنُّذُرِ (٢٣). The word نَذِيرِ is the plural of نَذِير (warner) and also a verbal noun from أَنْذَرَ (warning). If the first meaning is adopted, it would refer to the messengers who were warners or signs who served as reminders and warnings which were meant to awaken people. If the second meaning is adopted, it would refer to warnings, threats, reminders and intimidation.

¹⁹ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمٍ مُّسْتَمِرٍّ (١٩)

This is an explanation of the punishment which the Almighty unleashed on the people of 'Aḍ. He sent upon them a stormy wind from the North. صَرْصَر is a tempestuous winter wind which is ominous and portentous in nature. This would be a period of drought in Arabia. For

18. The 'Aḍ also rejected. Then observe how My punishment and My threats materialized.

19. We let loose on them a stormy wind at a perpetual time of bad omen.

these days, they would call it the “ominous period” or the “ill-fated period”. The words *يَوْمَ نَحْسِ* of the verse do not refer to a particular ill-fated day; they refer to a particular time period. The word *يَوْمٌ* is commonly used thus. Thus, at another place, the words used are: *أَيَّامَ نَحْسَاتٍ* and at other places it is specified that this stormy wind blew on them for seven nights and eight days.

The word *مُسْتَمِرٌّ* shows that this wind was not a temporary gust which people could have tolerated. It blew upon them as a scourge of God for seven to eight days.

تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُنْقَعِرٍ (٢٠)²⁰

Such was the force of this wind that it plucked out people as if they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees. In Sūrah Hāqqah, the word *خَاوِيَةٌ* (hollow) is used instead of *مُنْقَعِرٍ*. It is stated at other places in the Qur’ān that when the wind started to blow each person was pinned to the ground wherever he was and since the force of the wind continued to increase, no one was able to get up. In this state, every one perished and their dead bodies were hurled by the wind from one place to another as if they were hollow trunks of palm-trees.

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرٍ (٢١) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٢٢)²¹

These verses have already been explained at the end of Noah’s anecdote cited earlier.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِالنُّذُرِ (٢٣) فَقَالُوا أَبَشَرًا مِمَّنَّا وَاحِدًا نَتَّبِعُهُ إِنَّا إِدَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ (٢٤)²²

In a similar manner, the people of Thamūd too rejected the warnings of their messenger. They reckoned that if they regarded a human being from among them to be a messenger and then follow him, this would mean that they had been led astray and ruined. Generally, people have translated the word *سُعُرٍ* as “madness”; however, the manner in which this word is used here negates this usage. In my opinion, it is a plural and means “fire”. Verse forty seven of this *sūrah* reads: *إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ* (٤٧) (indeed,

20. Which plucked out people as if they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees.

21. So see how My punishment and My threats materialized. And We have made the Qur’ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?!!

22. The Thamūd also rejected the warning. They said: “Are we to follow a person who belongs to us? If we do so, we shall be clearly straying and end up in Hell.

the wrongdoers are in error and shall be flung into Hell). Obviously, this very warning must have been issued by Ṣāliḥ (rta) to his people as well. These people must have reacted by saying the same words to him: he says that if we do not accept his calls, we will be in error and cast into Hell; the fact of the matter is that if we accept his calls, we will then be in error and will be flung into Hell. Idioms such as “Be doomed” or “Go to Hell” are common in the English language as well. The relation between error and Hell is causative; however, no such relationship is comprehensible between error and madness.

أَوُلْقِيَ الذِّكْرُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا بَلْ هُوَ كَذَّابٌ أَشِرٌّ (٢٥)²³

The Thamūd were of the opinion that in the first place it was very strange that God make a human being a messenger and even stranger was the fact that of all the people God select Ṣāliḥ for this great task; there was nothing special about him that he be made the custodian of God's guidance; why should people who had been entrusted with the leadership of their nation for generations be ignored in this matter; thus it was absolutely impossible that this person be truthful in his claim; he was an absolute liar and a bragger; by claiming to be a messenger of God, he wanted to command them and prove his superiority to them.

سَيَعْلَمُونَ غَدًا مَنِ الْكَذَّابُ الْأَشِرُّ (٢٦)²⁴

In this verse, the Almighty has responded to their reaction forthwith: let them utter whatever nonsense they want to. The time of the judgement is near. The punishment of God is about to come. At that time, they will see who the liar and the bragger is.

إِنَّا مُرْسِلُو النَّاقَةِ فِتْنَةً لَهُمْ فَارْتَقِبْهُمْ وَاصْطَبِرْ (٢٧)²⁵

This is the prelude to the punishment alluded to in the previous verse: The Almighty would soon depute a special she-camel as a trial for them; so Ṣāliḥ (sws) should keep an eye on them and wait patiently for what happens i.e. how they deal with the she-camel and what fate they will as a result meet. The manner in which this she-camel became a trial for them is mentioned in the subsequent verses.

23. Did he alone among us receive this Reminder? In fact, he is indeed a liar, a boaster.

24. Tomorrow they shall know who the liar and the boaster is.

25. We will be sending a she-camel as a test for them. So keep a watch on them and have patience,

وَنَبِّئُهُمْ أَنَّ الْمَاءَ قِسْمَةٌ بَيْنَهُمْ كُلُّ شَرْبٍ مُّخْتَصِرٌ (٢٨)²⁶

After selecting a she-camel for the task, the Almighty asked Ṣāliḥ (sws) to inform his people that turns had been fixed to drink water from the fountain; no one would have the right to stop the she-camel from drinking when her turn came; if she was harmed in any way, then this would be a prelude to God's punishment. They were made to undergo this trial so that the evil in them was exposed and the extent of their rebelliousness was known to all. Obviously, after this warning that this she-camel was a sign of God's wrath only those people could have had the audacity to harm it who themselves were audacious enough to even harm their messenger. It is this extent of a nation's rebelliousness and arrogance after which it becomes worthy of divine punishment. After this, nothing remains to conclusively prove the truth to them.

فَنَادَوْا صَاحِبَهُمْ فَتَعَاطَى فَعَقَرَ (٢٩)²⁷

How could the Thamūd abide by this restriction? They thought that this was just a false threat made by the prophet Ṣāliḥ (sws). Thus they called upon their leader. He came forward and hamstrung the she-camel. The word تَعَاطَى means "to stand on one's toes to take the initiative in doing something." In other words, as per his own view, he showed great valour and took a very courageous step for his people; however, this daring step of his doomed them.

The word عَقَرَ means "to hamstring a camel". Once this is done, it becomes impossible for the animal to survive.

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذْرٍ (٣٠)²⁸

This verse has already been explained above. After this incident, people were faced with God's promised doom. It is evident from other places of the Qur'ān that after this they were given a further respite of three days: if they wanted, they could repent during that period; however, they did not benefit from this reprieve.

26. And inform them that the water is to be shared between them. Everyone shall come on his turn.

27. Then they cried out to their leader; so he came forward and hamstrung the she-camel.

28. Then observe how My punishment and My threats materialized.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَكَانُوا كَهَشِيمِ الْمُخْتَطِرِ (٣١)²⁹

The verse refers to the punishment which was faced by the Thamūd. The word صَيْحَةً means “a shout”. At another place, the word used is صَاعِقَةٌ (thunder). My mentor, Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, in his *tafsīr* of Sūrah Dhāriyāt has discussed the nature of this punishment in detail in the light of the Qur’ān. He has summarized this discussion at the end in the following words:

It is evident from these details that the Almighty unleashed on them the punishment of winter clouds, stormy wind and horrific thunder. However, their actual destruction took place through the wind. Thus, if one employs the method of adducing the consequence from the effect it becomes evident that the Almighty sent to them striped wintry clouds which contained horrific thunder and a deafening shout.

It should be kept in mind that a natural consequence of such thunder and lightning is a hail storm which, if it intensifies, takes the form of the terrible punishment of stone-pelting and quashes everything to bits and pieces.

The word مُخْتَطِر means the person who constructs a sheep-fold. Shepherds generally construct such folds in their fields with hay and brambles to protect their herds, which are kept there by night. Such a fold becomes trampled to bits and pieces after rain, windstorm and trampling of the animals. The word هَشِيم refers to such crushed bits and pieces. This, in other words, is a parable of their destruction: they were crushed to pieces by rain, thunder, wind and hail storms in the same manner as the trampled hedge of sheep-fold builder. Onlookers do think that there must have been some people living here; however, only their trampled ruins now remain.

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٣٢)³⁰

This repetitive verse has already been explained earlier.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ بِالَّذِي إِذْنا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَاصِبًا إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ بِسَحَرٍ (٣٤)³¹

The verses say that the people of Lot (sws) also rejected the warnings,

29. We sent upon them a single shout and they became like the trampled hedge of a sheep-fold builder.

30. And We have made the Qur’ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?!!

31. The people of Lot also rejected the warnings. So, We unleashed on them a stone-charged whirlwind; only the followers of Lot survived, whom,

and once the truth had been conclusively communicated to them by the Almighty, a stone-charged storm was unleashed on them by Him. The nature of a *حَاصِب* has already been explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Dhāriyāt.

The words *إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ* show that only the آل of Lot (sws) was protected from this storm. The word آل has already been explained at a relevant place in this *tafsīr*: the word does not merely include a person's real offspring; it also includes his symbolic offspring i.e. his followers etc.

The words *نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ بِسَحَرٍ* depict that God sifted out Lot (sws) and his followers at dawn which was before the time the torment descended on his people. One of the succeeding verses has referred to the time of this torment by the words: *وَلَقَدْ صَبَّحَهُم بُكْرَةً*. This shows that the torment appeared in the morning while these people had already vacated their place before the advent of dawn. This protection obviously was afforded to them by the special grace of God.

³² *نِعْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ شَكَرَ (٣٥)*

Being saved from such a horrific torment is only possible because of God's blessing; no one else can do such a thing.

The words *كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ شَكَرَ* not only express extra-ordinary praise for the trait of gratefulness found in Lot (sws), it is also an open proclamation of the fact that this favour of God is not specific to Lot (sws) alone; even today people who are grateful will be worthy of this special favour for vast is God's mercy.

³³ *وَلَقَدْ أَنْذَرَهُمْ بَطْشَتَنَا فَتَمَارَوْا بِالنُّذُرِ (٣٦)*

The previous verse was of the nature of a parenthetical sentence. This verse mentions the reason which made them liable for this punishment: it was their obduracy and stubbornness which made them liable for it. The messenger of God had fully informed them from every aspect that if they did not mend their ways, they would be seized by God and no one could help them against God; however, they tried to counter every admonition with baseless arguments.

32. As a special favour, We bailed out at dawn. Thus do We reward those who are grateful.

33. And, indeed, he informed them of Our grasp, but they only made foolish objections on the warnings.

وَلَقَدْ رَاوَدُوهُ عَنْ صَيْفِهِ فَطَمَسْنَا أَعْيُنَهُمْ فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذِرِ (٣٧)³⁴

Expressed in this verse is the last of their audacities after which the punishment of God arrived. Not only did they pay no heed to the warnings of the messenger on their licentious behaviour, they became more and more persistent in it as time passed. The stage came that when the angels appeared to Lot (sws) in the form of two handsome men, they charged towards his house and tried to convince him to hand over his guests to them so that they could quench their desire for them.

People who become blind and deaf in this manner are turned blind and deaf as per the established practice of God. At this stage, they are neither able to pay heed to any counsel nor to the greatest of signs. The only thing which then remains is God's scourge. Consequently, these people too were consigned to it.

It does not necessarily spring from the words طَمَسْنَا أَعْيُنَهُمْ that their eyes were quashed; it can also signify their total deprivation from drawing a lesson. At many places, this style has been adopted by the Qur'ān to convey this meaning. For example, in Sūrah Muḥammad, the words are:

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فَأَصَمَّهُمْ وَأَعَمَّى أَبْصَارَهُمْ (٤٧:٢٣)

It is these people whom God has accursed; thus leaving them deaf and sightless. (47:23)

In the light of the above verse, the meaning of طَمَسْنَا أَعْيُنَهُمْ would be that when they were overcome by their desires and reached this ultimate state, the Almighty afflicted them with a curse as result of which they were deprived of seeking any lesson for their future. The real utility of a person's eyes is not because of the sockets in which they are placed; their real purpose is to look beyond and discern things. A person who is deprived of this ability is a person accursed by God and he who has been cursed by God is permanently a target of his wrath.

Incidentally, it is also known that when these miscreants tried to lure Lot (sws) with regard to his guests, the latter in order to assure him had disclosed to him the secret that they were angels and not human beings and that these devils would never be able to even come near them. Right after this disclosure, they bade Lot (sws) leave the place. Once he had departed, it can be adduced that they assumed their actual form as angels and in this form human eyes were unable to see them.

34. And they tempted him about his guests; so We blinded their eyes; so taste My wrath and My warning.

وَلَقَدْ صَبَحَهُمْ بُكْرَةً عَذَابٌ مُسْتَقِرٌّ (٣٨)³⁵

In the morning, the torment of a stone-hurling wind descended upon them. It was generally at this time that caravans would be attacked and looted in Arabia. For this reason, the word صَبَح was used in the meaning of loot and plunder (check). It has been indicated earlier that Lot (sws) with his followers had left the place early at dawn, and here it is said that the punishment came when morning had set in. It can thus be deduced that the punishment alighted after Lot (sws) was afforded enough time to vacate the area.

The expression عَذَابٌ مُسْتَقِرٌّ means a lasting punishment. One form of punishment is that which comes merely for warning and which is meted out both to the believers and the disbelievers without any distinction. While the former learn a lesson from it, the latter only increase in their callousness from it. Another form of punishment is the one which is meted out to the immediate addressees of a messenger when they deny him. Each nation that was given such a punishment was given it in the form of an abiding torment. While the believers were sifted out from the area, those who had denied their messenger were destroyed at that place.

The word مُسْتَقِرٌّ is meant to point to the fact that the nature of this punishment was not momentary like a gust of wind; it took permanent hold of the place it was sent to.

فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ (٣٩) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٤٠)³⁶

This is the repetitive verse which occurs after every prophetic anecdote. I have fully explained it above.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَ آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ النُّذُرُ (٤١) كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كُلِّهَا فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ أَخَذَ عَزِيزٍ مُقْتَدِرٍ (٤٢)³⁷

Here at the end the fate of Pharaoh and his people has also been briefly alluded to. The word آل does not merely mean his family; it refers to the whole nation. The word النُّذُر is in the plural here, and the words كَذَّبُوا have explained this aspect. The word النُّذُر refers to all the signs of warning which manifested themselves at the hands of Moses (sws) to warn the Egyptians of the wrath of God and which have been discussed

35. And, indeed, at daybreak, an abiding punishment seized them.

36. And We have made the Qur'ān very appropriate for reminding. So is there anyone who shall take heed?

37. And, indeed, to the Pharaoh's people also came the warnings. But they rejected all Our signs; so We grasped them with the grasp of One Mighty, Powerful.

in detail in the Torah. The Qur'ān has also referred to them and I have explained them elsewhere. Each of these signs was enough to open their eyes; however, so callous had the hearts of these people become that in spite of seeing these signs they remained blind to them.

The words أَخَذَ عَزِيزٌ مُّقْتَدِرٌ refer to the fact that God seized them in a manner as someone who is profoundly powerful and potent seizes and from whose wrath no one can be shielded.

Section III: Verses (49-55)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah*. The leaders of the Quraysh are directly addressed and admonished and told to learn a lesson from the history of the Messengers and their nations recounted to them. They will meet the same fate as these nations met when they denied their respective messengers; they are not special so as not to meet this fate. Like them, they too shall be humiliated in this world and face even a worse fate in the world to come. At the end, a brief mention is made of the reward which those who remained fearful to God will receive. Readers may now proceed to study these verses:

Text and Translation

أَكْفَارُكُمْ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أُولَئِكَ أَمْ لَكُمْ بَرَاءَةٌ فِي الزُّبُرِ (٤٣) أَمْ يَقُولُونَ نَحْنُ جَمِيعٌ مُّنتَصِرُونَ (٤٤) سَيَهْزِمُ الْجَمْعُ وَيُؤَلُّونَ الدُّبُرَ (٤٥) بَلِ السَّاعَةُ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَالسَّاعَةُ أَذًى وَأَمْرٌ (٤٦) إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ (٤٧) يَوْمَ يُسْحَبُونَ فِي النَّارِ عَلَى وُجُوهِهِمْ ذُوقُوا مَسَّ سَقَرَ (٤٨) إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ (٤٩) وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ (٥٠) وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا أَشْيَاعَكُمْ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُّدَكِّيرٍ (٥١) وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي الزُّبُرِ (٥٢) وَكُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُّسْتَطَرٌّ (٥٣) إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ (٥٤) فِي مَقْعَدٍ صَدِيقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ (٥٥)

Are the disbelievers of your nation better than those of the other nations or is there an acquittal written for you in the heavenly scriptures? Do they claim: “We are a group who has the ability to fight back.” They should remember that their group shall soon be routed and they will turn and flee. (43-45)

In fact, the actual time in which the promise made to them shall be fulfilled is the Day of Judgement, and the Day of Judgement will be most grievous and most bitter. (46)

Indeed, these wrongdoers are in error and shall end up in Hell. They should remember the Day when they shall be dragged face-downwards

into the flames of Hell.³⁸ Taste ye now the sensation of Hell. (47-48)

We have created everything according to a measure. And Our directive will be fulfilled in the blink of an eye. And We destroyed nations like yourselves. So is there anyone who will take warning from their fate?! (49-51)

And everything they have done is recorded in registers and every matter, small or great, is noted down. (52-53)

Indeed, those who fear God shall dwell in the bliss of gardens and rivers, a place of permanent honour, before a Mighty King. (54-55)

أَكْفَارُكُمْ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أُولَئِكَمْ أَمْ لَكُمْ بَرَاءَةٌ فِي الزُّبُرِ (٤٣)

The Qurayash – who are under discussion since the beginning of the *sūrah* – are directly addressed here. They are told that they have heard of the fate of nations who denied their respective messengers. So why would God adopt a different attitude towards them if they follow in the footsteps of those nations? Are their disbelievers better than the disbelievers of those nations or is there some acquittal written for them in divine scriptures so that they can do whatever they like without any accountability? It is a requisite of God's justice that He deal with each nation in the same manner, and this is actually what is written in the scriptures. So from where have they obtained the permission of general immunity?

This subject is discussed in Sūrah Qalam in the following words: (have you a scripture in which you read that you will have whatever you desire? (68: 37-38))

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ نَحْنُ جَمِيعٌ مُّنتَصِرُونَ (٤٤) سَيُهْزَمُ الْجَمْعُ وَيُوَلُّونَ الدُّبُرَ (٤٥)

The implication of this verse is that if they think that they are a strong group and no one can harm them, then this thought of theirs is baseless. No one can resist the punishment of God.

Just as people who are proud of their strength in this way ignore any threat or warning from their opponents, the same way, in fact even more so, they do not regard the warnings of messengers of God to be worthy of

38. The author has overlooked part of the translation of this verse (into the flames of Hell), which I have inserted. (*Translator*)

39. Are the disbelievers of your nation better than those of the other nations or is there an acquittal written for you in the heavenly scriptures?

40. Do they claim: "We are a group who has the ability to fight back." They should remember that their group shall soon be routed and they will turn and flee.

attention. They rely so much on their worldly resources that they are unable to understand how and from where divine punishment will descend on them. These verses warn them that if they vainly reckon that they can fully defend themselves on every front, they should remember that their strength can be of absolutely no use to them before the might and power of God; when it manifests itself, they shall be routed and will scamper backwards.

بَلِ السَّاعَةِ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَالسَّاعَةُ أَذْهَى وَأَمْرٌ⁴¹ (٤٦)

The implication of this verse is that although they will be routed and ravaged in this world, the warnings sounded to them will in reality manifest in the Hereafter. It will be a very severe and bitter day for them.

It should remain in consideration that the punishment mentioned in the previous verse is necessarily meted out in this world to those who intentionally deny their messengers. In the verse under discussion, the punishment referred to is the one which they will face on the Day of Judgement, which will be very critical for them.

I have explained the established practice of God at a number of places of this *tafsīr* that the immediate addressees of a messenger who deny him are humbled in this world and in the Hereafter too they are humiliated. It is to this latter reality that this verse refers.

The word مَوْعِد is an adverb of place or time here. It means the real place or time at which these threats sounded to them will materialize.

The word أَذْهَى means that that Day will be so ruthless that people will not know what is going on around them. Each person will be worried stiff.

إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعْرٍ⁴² (٤٧)

Today these sinners conceitedly say that if they regarded a human being from among themselves to be a messenger of God and then followed him, they would end up in error and in Hell; however, on that day, they will see with their own eyes that those who denied the warnings of the messenger were in grave error and the result was that they ended up in Hell. The word سُعْر as I have referred to earlier does not mean madness; it refers to Hell. It is mentioned in the plural so that the various sections and abodes of Hell can be alluded to. In a similar

41. In fact, the actual time in which the promise made to them shall be fulfilled is the Day of Judgement, and the Day of Judgement will be most grievous and most bitter.

42. Indeed, these wrongdoers are in error and shall end up in Hell.

manner, the word جَنَّاتٌ is used in the plural at many places in the Qur'ān.

يَوْمَ يُسْحَبُونَ فِي النَّارِ عَلَى وُجُوهِهِمْ ذُوقُوا مَسَّ سَقَرَ (٤٨)⁴³

Expressed here is a reminder of the humiliation which the sinners will face on that day. Today these people are denying out of great pride and arrogance; however, soon the day will come when they will be dragged face wards to the fire of Hell. This obviously is a form of extreme humiliation. This punishment will be given to them because out of arrogance and pride they denied an obvious reality.

The words ذُوقُوا مَسَّ سَقَرَ can be expressed through the tongue and can also be a reflection of their circumstances. I prefer the latter. The way they will be dragged face wards will clearly inform them why they are being treated in this manner.

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ (٤٩)⁴⁴

The promised punishment and the Day of Judgement are certain to come. As far as the question of their exact time of arrival is concerned, the answer is that God has created everything with a special measure and set a definite time period for everything so that it achieves the purpose for which it was created. He deals with nations on a similar pattern as well. If a nation becomes rebellious, He does not seize it at once; He gives it enough respite in which it is able to enliven its abilities of good and evil so that the truth is conclusively communicated to it and it is left with no excuse to put forward on the Day of Judgement. The Quraysh will be dealt in a similar way too. He will give them the requisite respite which they should get as per His law so that if they want to mend their ways in the light of prophetic guidance they are afforded this opportunity; and if this is not to be the case, then enough time should elapse so that when they are seized, they do not complain that they were not given enough time and that had they been given more time they would have reformed themselves. Thus the path of salvation is that they benefit from the time period God has blessed them with and they do not call for the punishment in haste. Its time is fixed; when it will come, no one will be able to stop it.

43. They should remember the Day when they shall be dragged face-downwards into the flames of Hell. Taste ye now the sensation of Hell.

44. We have created everything according to a measure.

وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ (٥٠)⁴⁵

They should not remain under the misconception that God has to make preparations to bring about the punishment and the Day of Judgement and this is what is causing the delay; there is no such impediment in God's way. When He wants to bring it about, He need only order it; not even a repetition of this order will be needed. He also does not require to make elaborate arrangements to give such a directive; it will materialize in the blink of an eye.

وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا أَشْيَاعَكُمْ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ (٥١)⁴⁶

Why has a delay in the punishment enticed them to believe that it is a false threat? If it has not come upon them, then they should see that it did come on the previous nations who were destroyed by God as a result; so why don't they learn a lesson from this? The word أَشْيَاعَكُمْ refers to nations whose anecdotes have been recounted earlier in the *sūrah*. The implication is that it is a requisite of intellect that man learn a lesson from the fate of others and not believe when everything happens. What use will believing at that time be to him?

وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي الزُّبُرِ (٥٢) وَكُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُسْتَطَرٌّ (٥٣)⁴⁷

They should also not have the misconception that any of their words or deeds are beyond the knowledge of God. Whatever they have done, whether minute or massive has been recorded. God will present to every individual each and everything he had done. The wrongdoer will cry out about the strange nature of the register which recorded every small or big matter in it.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ (٥٤)⁴⁸

After the wrong-doers, mentioned here is the fortune of the righteous: they will dwell in the bliss of orchards and rivers. The word مُتَّقِينَ here occurs in contrast to the word مُجْرِمِينَ which refers to those who have denied reward and punishment. Thus, مُتَّقِينَ would refer to people who feared being brought into the presence of God and feared punishment.

45. And Our directive will be fulfilled in the blink of an eye.

46. And We destroyed nations like yourselves. So is there anyone who will take warning from their fate?!

47. And everything they have done is recorded in registers and every matter, small or great, is noted down.

48. Indeed, those who fear God shall dwell in the bliss of gardens and rivers,

The plural word جَنَّاتٍ shows the expansive nature of Paradise as well as the fact that each person will be given several orchards and within them will be several orchards and mini-orchards. The next *sūrah* will give more details of this. After the word فِي an ellipses of the *mudāf* occurs signifying the fact that they will be surrounded in the bliss of orchards and rivers. Orchards and rivers are inseparable. Without a river, one cannot imagine an orchard. For this reason, almost at every instance in the Qur'ān, whenever an orchard is mentioned, rivers too are alluded to.

فِي مَقْعَدٍ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ (٥٥)⁴⁹

Indicated here is the real success of the believers: this eternal bliss of Paradise will be given to them in a place of permanent honour before a Mighty King. It is this proximity to God makes Paradise into Paradise otherwise it is nothing more than an orchard.

The annexure of مَقْعَدٍ to صِدْقٍ shows the formers' permanence and repute just as these meanings are found in the expression لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ. The implication is that the honour they will receive by being in the presence of God will neither be a pretentious display nor temporary so that no one can be held responsible if this honour is taken away after a while.

In the expression عِنْدَ مَلِكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ the word مَلِكٍ has more emphasis than مَلِك. The attribute مُّقْتَدِرٍ further stresses it. The implication is that the king of the heavens and the earth is not king just in name as the Idolaters and some misguided sects believe and who regard God to be a remote being who no longer plays any role in their lives; the fact of the matter is that He possesses a vast dominion.

The word عِنْدَ points to another reality as well: The highest status a person can attain is that he will be able to attain an honourable place near the King of the heavens and the earth. He will never merge into God and become God as is claimed by some esoteric sufis.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*.
فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ (gratitude be to God on this)

Lahore,
11th August 1977 AD
25th Sha'bān 1397 AH

49. A place of permanent honour, before a Mighty King.